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NO. 1.

LOST MAN'S LANE.

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT THE HALL.

But in another moment she was back, her eyes dilated and her whole person breathing out a terrible purpose.

"Do not look at me, do not notice me," she cried, but in a voice so hoarse no one but Mr. Gryce could fully understand her. "I am for no one's eyes but God's. Pray that he may have mercy upon me." Then she saw as all instinctively fall back she controlled herself, and pointing toward Mother Jane's cottage, said more distinctly: "As for those men, let them dig. Let them dig the whole day long. Secrecy is for us, a secrecy so absolute that not even the birds of the air must see that our thoughts range beyond the 40 rods surrounding Mother Jane's cottage."

She turned and would have fled away for the second time, but Mr. Gryce stopped her. "You have set yourself a task beyond your strength. Can you perform it?"

"I can perform it," she said, "if Loren does not talk, and I am allowed to weep my tears alone."

"But," said Mr. Gryce, "no, when he left Olive Randolph's bedside after an hour of vain pleading, 'But to wait all day! Is it necessary for you to wait all day?'"

"It is necessary," she spoke like an automaton. "Tonight at twilight, when the sun is setting, at the great tree just before the road turns. Not a minute sooner, not an hour later. I will be calmer then." And waiting now for nothing, not for a word from Loren or a detaining touch from Mr. Gryce, she flew away for the second time. This time Loren followed her.

"Well, that is the hardest thing I ever had to do," said Mr. Gryce, wiping his forehead and speaking in a tone of real grief and anxiety. "Do you think her delicate frame can stand it? Will she survive this day and carry through whatever it is she has set herself to accomplish?"

"She has no organic disease," said Mr. Gryce, "but she loved that young man very much, and the day will be a terrible one to her."

Mr. Gryce sighed.

"I wish I had not been obliged to resort to such means," said he, "but women like that only work under excitement, and she does know the secret of this affair."

"Do you mean," he demanded, almost aghast, "that you have deceived her with a false telegram; that that slip of paper you hold—"

"Read it," he cried, holding it out toward her.

I did read it. Alas, there was no deception in it. It was a bona fide and read very much as he had said it did.

"However," I began.

But he had pocketed the telegram and was several steps away before I had got any further.

"I am going to start these men up," said he. "You will breathe no word to Miss Knollys of my sympathy nor let your own interest slack in the investigations which are going on under our noses."

And with a quick, sharp bow he made his way to the gate, whither I followed him in time to see him set his foot upon a patch of rosemary.

"You will begin at this place," he cried, "and work east, and gentlemen, something tells me that we will be successful."

With almost a simultaneous sound a dozen spades and picks struck the ground. The digging up of Mother Jane's garden had begun in earnest.

I stand about that gate most of the day. If I moved away, I imagined that Mr. Gryce was uneasy and wanted me back under his eye. So Lucetta was invisible and Loren in a strained and anxious mood, I followed the example of many of the other villagers who had ventured into the lane for the first time in months, and now stood watching every shovelful of earth that was thrown out, disappointed as the task had become as hour after hour passed without any discovery.

Along toward noon I had a diversion if the rest had not. Mr. Trohm came riding up in his buggy, and somewhat later in the day Deacon Spear came boldly upon the field, though none so near our gate, at which Saracen sat growling. The talk I had with Mr. Trohm was of a delicate nature, not bearing repetition, but the few curt words I exchanged with Deacon Spear may amuse the reader or at least satisfy some of my good friends that I am not so given over to vanity as to be misled by every passing compliment a man may pay me.

He was, as I was saying, drawn up on the opposite side of the road, but when he saw me he made a very low bow and sidled a step forward. This made me draw myself up a bit, though I had no idea what was coming. He seemed to take that for an invitation, for, pointing toward Saracen, he asked if the dog was quiet, and when I in a superior way answered that he was as quiet as a lamb he edged up to where I was standing and sheepishly held out his hand.

"I have been thinking," he drawled, "that it was only neighborly for me to call upon you, Miss Butterworth. But this business which has occupied the lane these last few days has put up all into such a mood of unpleasantness that there was no use of trying sociability on any one."

His hair was so sleek, his eyes so small and so twinkling, that I began to have respect for William's opinion of him, but I said nothing, possibly be-

cause I only half heard what he had just said himself.

"I'm no lady's man"—these were the next words I heard—"but, then, I judge, you're not in for flattery and all that kind of thing yourself. So now I've got the chance, I'll just say the thing I've got on my tongue to say. Miss Butterworth, I'm 53 and I have been a widower two years. I'm not fitted for a solitary life, and I am fitted for a comfortable life with an affectionate wife to keep my heart sweet and clean and my own affections in good working order. Will you be that wife? I have a neat cottage—"

"Yes," said I, "in Lost Man's lane."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "you do not like this place? Well, we could go elsewhere. I am not set against the city myself."

"Not against the comfortable little income somebody has told you I possessed," cried I. "I see your disinterestedness, but I should be sorry to profit by it. Why, man, I never spoke to you before in my life, and do you think—"

"Oh," said he, "I see you are not above flattery and those things. Well, madam, I know a tremendous fine woman when I see her without talking away a dozen evenings on politics, religion and what not. I don't need to know any more about you than I can take in with my two eyes, but if you would like a little more acquaintance with me, why, I can wait a couple of weeks till we've rubbed the edges a little off our strangeness, when—"

"When you think I will be so charmed with Deacon Spear that I will be ready to settle down with him in Lost Man's lane, or if that will not do carry him off to Gammercy park, where he will be the admiration of all New York and Brooklyn to boot. Why, man, if I was so easily satisfied as that I would not be in a position today for you to honor me with this proposal. I am not easy to suit, so I advise you to turn your attention to some one much more anxious to be married than I am, but not before this mystery is settled in Lost Man's lane. If you were an honest man, you would ask no one to share your fortune while any cloud rests upon your honor."

"My honor! Madam, be careful. I admire you, but—"

"No offense," said I. "For a stranger I have perhaps indulged in a little freedom. I only mean that any one who lives in this lane must feel that the shadow which envelops it rests also a little upon him. When that is lifted, each one will feel himself a man again. From indications yonder that day may not be far away. Mother Jane is a like-ly source for such a mystery. She knows just little enough to have no proper idea of the value of a human life."

"Madam," said Deacon Spear, "I have not that much interest in what is going on over there." Here he snapped his fingers. "If men have been killed in this lane—which I do not believe—she never had no hand in it. What I think is that it's all a coincidence. Each and every person who has disappeared has disappeared naturally. No one has been killed. That is my theory, madam, and you will find it correct. On this point I have expended much thought."

I was irate; I was also dumfounded at his audacity. Did he think I was the woman to swallow that? But I shut my lips tight lest I should say something, and he, not finding that agreeable, being no conversationalist himself, drew off after awhile with some pompous expression of hoping to see me again after his honor was cleared up in my very particular eyes.

It was the second proposal I had received that day, but the first—well, I did not accept that either, though my deduction was a little kinder than the one I thought best to inflict upon Deacon Spear.

A day of unparalleled anxiety broken by such episodes as these!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNDER A CRIMSON SKY.

At 5 o'clock the diggers began to go home. Nothing had been found, and the excitement of search which had animated them early in the day had given place to a dull resentment mainly directed toward the Knollys, if one could judge of these men's feelings by the heavy scowls and significant gestures with which they passed its broken down gateway.

By 6 the last man had filed by, leaving Mr. Gryce free for the work which lay before him.

I had retired long before this to my room, where I awaited the hour set by Lucetta with a feverish impatience quite new to me. As none of us could eat, the supper table had not been laid, and though I had no means of knowing what was in store for us the somber silence and oppression under which the whole house lay seemed a portent that was by no means encouraging.

Suddenly I heard a knock at my door. Rising hastily, I opened it. Loren stood before me, with parted lips and terror in all her looks.

"Come!" she cried. "Come and see what I have found in Lucetta's room."

As she was already half way down the hall I hastened to follow her, and in a few moments found myself on the threshold of the room I knew to be Lucetta's.

"She made me promise," cried Loren, halting to look back at me, "that I would let her go alone and that I would not enter the highway till an hour after she had left. But after this how can we stay in this house?" And

dragging me to a table, she showed me lying on its top a folded paper and two letters. The folded paper was Lucetta's will and the letters were directed severally to Loren and to myself with the injunction on them that they were not to be read till she had been gone six hours.

"Serious!" I murmured. "But Mr. Gryce is with her."

"No one is with her. Mr. Gryce may be near, but she has undertaken her task alone. Miss Butterworth, I have never broken a promise before in all my life, but I am going to break this. Come, let us fly to her. She has her lover's memory, but I have nothing in all the world but her."

I immediately turned, and we hastened down the stairs, but at the foot Loren gave me a look and said:

"My promise was not to enter the highway. Would you be afraid to follow me by another road—secret road—all overgrown with thistles and black-berry bushes which have not been trimmed up for years?"

I thought of my thin shoes, my neat silk dress, but only to forget them the next moment.

"I will go anywhere," said I. "But where, where has Lucetta gone? Is it to Deacon Spear's? If so—"

But Loren was already too far in advance of me to answer. She was young, she was lithe and was down as far as the kitchen before I had passed the flower parlor. But when we had sped clear of the house I found that my progress had been as rapid as hers, for her agitation was a hindrance to her, while excitement always brings out my powers and heightens both my wit and my judgment.

Our way lay past the stables, from which I expected every minute to see two or three dogs jump. But William, who had been discreetly sent out of the way early in the afternoon by the two sisters, had taken Saracen with him, and possibly the rest, so our passing by disturbed nothing, not even ourselves. The next moment we were in a field of prickles, through which we both struggled till we came into a sort of swamp. This was bad going, but we floundered through it, edging continually as I could not but see toward a distant fence beyond which rose the symmetrical lines of an orchard.

"Loren," I cried, "Loren, those are Mr. Trohm's grounds! Must we pass through them?"

"It's the shortest way," she shouted back, for among the hummocks of the swamp she had got the start of me again.

And, unpleasant as I felt this intrusion to be, I hastened on, overtaking her once more just as we reached a tiny gateway so covered with vines that there was no need for Loren to say:

"I do not believe this has been opened for years, but it must be opened now." And, throwing her young strength against it, she burst it through with all its vines, and bidding me pass she stepped herself over the trailing branches and made without a word for the winding path we now saw clearly defined on the edge of the orchard before us.

"Oh," exclaimed Loren, stopping one moment to catch her breath. "I do not know what I fear or to what our steps will bring us. I only know that I must hunt for Lucetta till I find her. If there is danger where she is, I must share it. You can rest here or come farther on. But what is this?"

It was a man. He had started suddenly from some one of the shadows near the hedgerow.

"Silence!" he whispered, putting his finger on his lips. "If you are looking for Miss Knollys," he added, seeing us both pause aghast, "she is on the lawn beyond, talking to Mr. Trohm. If you come here, you can see her. She is in no kind of danger, but if she were Mr. Gryce is in the first row of trees to the back there, and a call from me!"

That made me remember my whistle. It was still round my neck, but my hand, which had instinctively gone to it, fell again in extraordinary emotion as I took in the situation he had hinted at and realized that it was on Mr. Trohm's grounds we stood and that it was toward Mr. Trohm himself Loren's looks of unmistakable fear and dread were turned.

"Loren," I whispered, "it is not here you look for a solution of that awful mystery?"

"Miss Butterworth," she answered, "it is here you should look for it."

"Here?" I never leave I felt such emotion and never have I so nearly succumbed to it. "What do you mean?" I prayed. "Tell me, tell me quickly what you mean!"

"I mean," she gasped, "that that is the man who has pushed us with his hatred, driving my father and my mother into their graves. Obadiah Trohm is the rich man of whom we spoke to you; not Deacon Spear or any one else; you; not the unhappy lane." And breaking from me she slid away nearer the ill assorted couple, in one of whom there was a kind of country gentleman, but a monster of venal propensities, if not something worse and still more diabolical.

"Come!" she beckoned, happily too absorbed in her own emotions to notice mine. "Let us get nearer. If Mr. Trohm is the wicked man we fear, there is no telling what the means are which he uses to get rid of his victims. There was nothing to be found in his house, but who knows but that the danger may be around her now. It was evidently to dare it she came, to offer herself as a martyr that we might know—"

"Hush!" I whispered, controlling my own fears roused against my will by this display of terror in this usually calmest of natures. "No danger can menace her there, not where they two stand, unless he is a common assassin and carries a pistol!"

"No pistol," murmured the man who had crept again near us. "Pistols make a noise. He will not use a pistol."

"Good God!" I whispered. "You are not anticipating also that it is in the heart of this man to kill Lucetta?"

"Six strong men have disappeared

hereabout," said the fellow, never moving his eye from the couple before us. "Why not one weak girl?"

With a cry Loren started forward. "Run!" she whispered. "Run!"

But as this word left her lips a slight movement took place in the belt of trees where we had been told Mr. Gryce lay in hiding, and we could see him issue for a moment into sight with his finger like that of his man laid warningly on his lips. Loren trembled and drew back, seeing which the man beside us pointed to the hedge and whispered softly:

"There is just room between that and the fence for a person to pass sideways. If you and this lady want to get nearer to Miss Knollys, you might take that road. But Mr. Gryce will expect you to be very quiet. The young lady expressed said before she came into this place that she could do nothing if for any reason Mr. Trohm should suspect that they were not alone."

"We will be quiet," I assured him, anxious to hide my face, which I felt twitch at every mention of Mr. Trohm's name behind the screen he thus offered for our use. Loren was already behind the hedge.

The evening was one of those which are made for peace. The sun, which had set in crimson, had left a glow on the branches of the forest which had not yet faded into the gray of twilight. The lawn, around which we were skirting, had not lost the mellow brilliancy which made it sparkle, nor had the cluster of varied hued hollyhocks, which set their gorgeousness against the near yellow of the peaceful doorknobs, shown any dimness in their glory, which was a par with the setting sun. But though I saw all this it no longer appeared to me desirable. Lucetta and Lucetta's fate, the mystery and the impossibility of its being explained out here in the midst of turf and blossoms, filled all my thoughts and made me forget even my own cause for shame and humiliation, if not sorrow.

Loren, who had worried her way along till she crouched nearly opposite to them, plucked me by the gown as I approached to where she was, and, pointing to the hedge which pressed up so close it nearly touched our faces,

saying, "so she has come to see me; come to taunt me with the loss of her lover, whom she says I have robbed her of almost before her eyes! I rob her! How can I rob her or any one of a man with a voice and arm of his own stronger than mine? Am I a wizard to dissipate his body in vapor? Yet it is here in my house or on my lawn? You are a fool, Lucetta; so are all these men about here fools! It is in your house!"

"Hush!" she cried, her slight figure rising till we forgot it was the feeble Lucetta we were gazing at. "No more accusations directed against us. It is you who must meet them now. Mr. Trohm, your evil practices are discovered. Tomorrow you will have the police here in earnest. They did but play with you when they were here before."

"You child!" he gasped, striving, however, to restrain all evidences of shock and terror. "Why, who was it called in the police and set them working in Lost Man's lane? Was it not I?"

"Yes, that they might not suspect you and perhaps that they might suspect us. But it was useless, Obadiah Trohm. Althea Knollys' children have been long suffering, but the limit has been reached at last. When you laid your hand upon my lover, you roused a spirit in me that nothing but your own destruction could satisfy. Where is he, Mr. Trohm? Where is silly Rufus and all the rest who have vanished between Deacon Spear's house and the little home of the cripples on the high-road? They have asked me, but if any one in Lost Man's lane can answer that question it is you, persecutor of my mother, of ourselves, whom I here denounce in face of these skies where God reigns and this earth where man lives to harry and condemn."

And then I saw that the instinct of this girl had accomplished what mere human scorn had failed in. For the old man—indeed he seemed an old man now—cringing and the wrinkles came out in his face till he was demoniacally ugly.

"You viper!" he shrieked. "How dare you accuse me of crime—you whose mother would have died in jail but for my forbearance? Have you ever seen me set my foot upon a worm? Look at my fruit and flowers, look at my

home, without a spot or blemish to mar its neatness and propriety. Can a man who loves these things stomach the destruction of a man, much less of a silly, yawning boy? Lucetta, you are mad!"

"Mad or sane, my accusation will have its results, Mr. Trohm. I believe too deeply in your guilt not to make others do so."

"Ah," said he, "then you have not done so yet? You believe this and that, but you have not said so."

"No," she calmly returned, though her face blanched at the colorlessness of wax. "I have not said so yet."

Oh, the cunning that crept into his face!

"She has not said it. Oh, the little Lucetta, the wise, the careful little Lucetta!"

"But I will," she cried, meeting his eye with the courage and constancy of a martyr, "though I bring death upon myself. I will denounce you and do it before the night has settled down upon us. I have a lover to avenge, a brother to defend. Besides, the earth should be rid of such a monster as you."

"Such a monster as I? Well, my pretty one"—his voice grew suddenly wheedling, his face a study of mingled passions—"we will see about that. Come just a step nearer, Lucetta. I want to see if you are really the little girl I used to dandle on my knee."

They were now near the gateway. They had been moving all this time. His hand was on the curb of the old well. His face, so turned that it caught the full glare of the setting sun, leaned toward the girl, exerting a fascinating influence upon her. She took the step he asked, and before we could shriek out "Beware!" we saw him bend forward with a sudden, quick motion and then start upright again, while her form, which but an instant before had stood there in all its frail and inspired beauty, tottered as if the ground were bending under it, and in another moment disappeared from our appalled sight, swallowed in some dreadful cavern that for an instant yawned in the smoothly cut lawn before us and then vanished again from sight as if it had never been.

A shriek from my whistle, mingled

seemed to bid me to look through. Searching for a spot where there was a small opening, I put my eye to this and immediately drew back.

"They are moving nearer the gate," I signaled to Loren, at which she crept along a few paces, but with a stealth so great that, listening as I was, I could not hear a twig snap. I endeavored to imitate her, but not with as much success as I could wish. The sense of horror which had all at once settled upon me, the supernatural dread of something which I could not see, but which I felt, had seized me for the first time and made that ruddy sky and the broad stretch of velvet turf with the shadows playing over it of swaying tree tops and clustered oleanders, more thrilling and awesome to me than the dim halls of that midnight house when I saw a body carried out for burial amid groans and hush and a mystery so great it would have daunted most spirits for all their lives.

The very sweetness of the scene made its horror. Never have I had such sensations, never have I felt so the power of the unseen, yet that anything would happen here, anything which would explain the total disappearance of several persons at different times without a trace of their fate being left to the eye on this spot or in the house beyond, seemed so impossible that I could not, like my state to that of nightmares, where visions take the place of realities and often overwhelm them.

I had pressed too close against the hedge as I struggled with these feelings, and the sound I made struck me as distinct, if not alarming, but the tree tops were rustling, too, and, while Lucetta might have heard, her companion gave no evidence of doing so. We could hear what they were saying now, and realizing that we stopped moving and gave our whole attention up to listening. Mr. Trohm was speaking. I could hardly believe it was his voice, it had so changed in tone, nor could I see in his features, distorted as they now were by every evil passion, the once quiet and dignified countenance which had so lately imposed upon me.

"Lucetta, my little Lucetta," he was

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"Lucetta, my little Lucetta," he was

with a simultaneous cry of agony from Loren and the bushes in our rear. We heard Mr. Gryce rush, but we ourselves found it impossible to stir, paralyzed as we were by the sight of the old man's demoniacal delight. He was leaping to and fro over the turf, holding up his fingers in the red sunset glare.

"Six!" he shrieked. "Six! And room for two more. Oh, it's a merry life I lead. Flowers and fruit and loveliness (Oh, how I cringed at that!), and now and then a little spice like this! But where is my pretty Lucetta? Surely she was here a moment ago. How could she have vanished then so quickly. I do not see her form amid the trees, there is no trace upon the lawn, and if they search the house from top to bottom and from bottom to top they will find nothing of her—no, not so much as a print of her footstep or the scent of the violets she so often wears tucked into her hair."

These last words, uttered in a different voice from the rest, gave the clue to the whole situation. We saw, even while we all bounded forward to the rescue of those maniacs who have perfect control over themselves and pass for very decent sort of men except in the moment of triumph, and, noting his look of sinister delight, perceived that half his pleasure and almost his sole reward for the horrible crimes he had perpetrated was in the mystery surrounding his victims and the entire immunity from suspicion which up to this time he had fancied himself to enjoy.

Meantime Mr. Gryce had covered the wretch with his pistol, and his man, who succeeded in reaching the place even sooner than ourselves, hampered as we were by the almost impenetrable hedge behind which we had crouched, tried to lift the grass covered lid we could faintly discern there. But this was impossible until I, with almost supernatural self-possession, considering the imperative nature of the emergency, found the spring hidden in the well curb which worked the deadly mechanism. A yell from the writhing creature, cowering under the detective's pistol, guided me unconsciously in its action, and in another moment we saw the fatal lid tip and disclose what appeared to be the remains of a second wall, long ago dried up and abandoned for the other.

The rescue of Lucetta followed after more or less difficulty. As she had fainted in falling she had not suffered much, and soon we had the supreme delight of seeing her eyes unclose upon the face of Loren.

"Ah," she murmured in a voice whose echo pierced to every heart save that of the guilty wretch now lying handfast on the ground. "I thought I saw Albert, and he was dead, and I—"

But here Mr. Gryce, with an air at once contrite and yet strangely triumphant, interposed his benevolent face between her and her weeping sister, and whispered something in her ear which turned her pallid cheek to a glowing scarlet. Rising up, she threw her arms around his neck and let him lift her. As he carried her—where was his rheumatism now—out of those baleful grounds and away from the reach of the maniac's mingled laughs and cries her face was peace itself. But his—well, his was a study.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT SATURDAY.

THE COMING LEGISLATURE.

Nothing Much to Do Except to Put in the Time.

The next session of the general assembly convenes on Tuesday, January 10. The Columbia correspondent of The News and Courier speaks of the outlook as follows:

There does not appear to be very much for the general assembly to do at the approaching session. The general laws which the constitution contemplated have been passed, and about all that is legitimately in prospect is the amending of existing general laws in such particulars as is deemed necessary. Since 1892 the dispensary law has been the great bone of contention in every general assembly, and it is liable to be the same this year. The whole thing now, however, seems to have gotten down to a downright scramble as to who shall have charge of the great "moral" institution. Leaders are sitting up and dreaming and planning how to get charge of the institution. Of course no one has a right to suggest that there is anything improper in striving to secure control of such machinery; but such now really appears to be the fact.

The real fight, as now appears, that will be before the general assembly will be who shall have control of the dispensary machinery. Will it be the present state board of control? Will it be a board consisting of the governor, or comptroller general and secretary of state, or some other state officers, as was the law before the present plan was adopted? Will it be one commissioner? Will it be something entirely new?

Governor Ellerbe is antagonistic to the state board of control, with its present powers. The state board of control thinks the present plan is the best solution of the question of management. Some who are ambitious to show how the business can be successfully managed want to have a carte blanche and show what they can do. One strong card the state board of control always has had is that there are so many of the members of the general assembly who are willing to give up their places in the general assembly to accept places on the state board of control—four members of the present board were members of the general assembly at one time. On account of the expected conflict on the question of management of the state dispensary that part of the message of Governor Ellerbe which relates to the dispensary and the annual report of the state board of control are being eagerly looked for.

THE COUNTY COURT BILL.

Here Is a Statement of Representative